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ABSTRACT

A teacher certification testing program was mandated by the 1980 Oklahoma Legislature in HB 1706. The bill calls for a general upgrading of the teaching profession through more stringent teacher preparation programs, uniformity of training, and a concomitant improvement of salaries to reflect the healthy economy of Oklahoma. A central focus of the legislation is the testing mandate intended to establish a standard for assessment of minimum level competencies in the teaching content areas for which certificates are granted. Actual teaching competencies are addressed in the bill. Successful completion of the curriculum examinations enables graduates of approved teacher education programs from Oklahoma colleges and universities to obtain a license to teach or to do an entry year of teaching. A year of successful teaching precedes certification. There are currently 79 curriculum examinations to coincide with certification areas, and examinees may take as many as eight tests in one 2-day administration. The approval of in-state students' director of teaching education at the college or university is required before the student's test registration will be accepted. (Author/CM)

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TESTING FOR TEACHER CERTIFICATION: OKLAHOMA'S HB 1706
By Sandra J. Mayfield, Ph.D., and Marlene Ryals White

Oklahoma has joined a number of states which are requiring examinations for classroom teachers as one response to increasing public pressure to upgrade teacher education standards. But Oklahoma's House Bill 1706 is much more than a teacher testing law. It represents one of the most comprehensive attempts to improve teacher education, as it addresses not only curriculum content knowledge through the examinations, but also classroom teaching competence, salaries, licensure, certification, staff development, and teacher education faculty development. Written by members of Oklahoma's House Common Education Committee, the twenty-three section bill calls for the establishment of a non-teaching citizens commission on education, as well as a teacher register along with a job availability list. The intention of HB 1706 authors was "...to ensure that the children of the state are taught by professional educators, fully trained in their areas of expertise." (From HB 1706, Section 10.)

Political rhetoric aside, HB 1706 appears to contain an impressive amount of substance, an ambitious scope of impact, and certainly a revolutionary approach to modifying teacher education. Of particular significance in this bill are the changes in process and in power which the new certification procedure represents. Figure 1 depicts the step-by-step processes required for certification before and after HB 1706.

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Certification Before HB 1706

1. Completion of approved program
 - A. Recommendation of College or University
 - or
 - B. Out-of-State Certification
2. State Board of Education Approval
3. Certification

Certification After HB 1706

1. Completion of approved program
 - A. Recommendation of College or University
 - or
 - B. Out-of-State Certification
2. EXAM
3. State Board of Education Approval
4. Licensure
5. Recommendation of Entry Year Assistance Committee
6. Recommendation of Local School District
7. Certification

Figure 1

New steps involved in the certification process include the examination(s), the license, the recommendation of the Entry Year Assistance Committee (EYAC), and the recommendation of the individual by the local school district for advancement from licensure to complete certification. The changes compound the certification process and serve as a checks-and-balances system, or supplement, to the approved program approach to teacher certification.

Prior to HB 1706, the approved program approach meant that graduates of state institutions whose teacher education programs had been approved by the Oklahoma State Department of Education would, upon satisfactory completion of the college program of study and upon receipt of the recommendation of the graduating institution, receive certification to teach. Out-of-state applicants who had graduated from an accredited institution which had been approved as a teacher preparatory institution within their states were eligible for certification if the course work met minimum State Board requirements in Oklahoma. All applicants must have met the recency requirement of having taught three of the past five years or must have completed eight semester hours or a combination of teaching experience in an accredited school and college credit within the five years preceding application for certification. For purposes of recency, one year of teaching experience is equivalent to three (3) semester hours of college credit.

For those whose graduation date is after February 1, 1982, HB 1706 mandates that the prospective teacher pass the curriculum examination(s) prior to licensure. A "grandparent clause" is written into the law which exempts those whose graduation date precedes February of 1982. That exemption applies to currently certified teachers and all other individuals who completed an approved teacher education program prior to February 1, 1982. These exemptions are thought to make the testing requirement more nearly practicable. Figure 2 shows the centrality of the exams to the certification process.

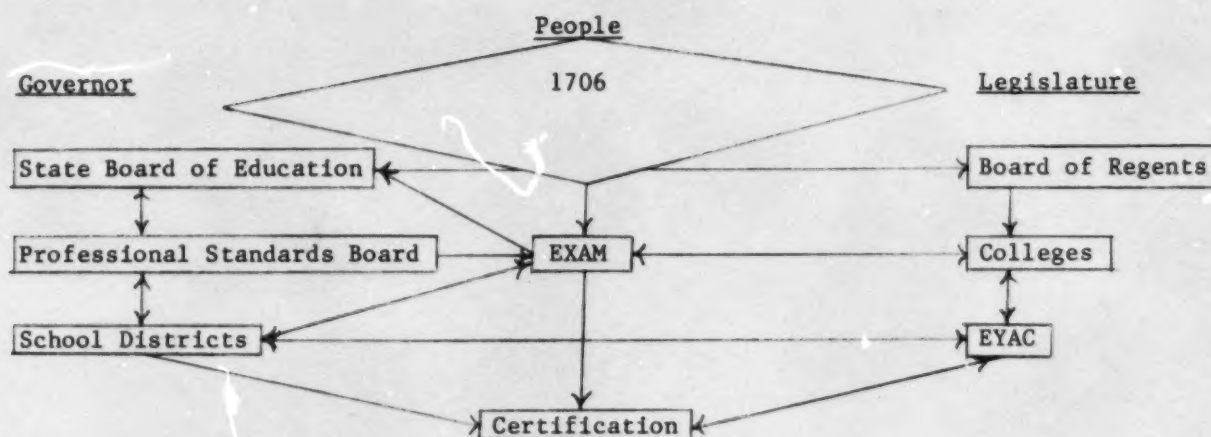


Figure 2

The license, obtainable after successful completion of the curriculum exam(s) and after having met an approved teacher education program, entitles the graduate to teach for one year under supervision by an Entry Year Assistance Committee. The EYAC consists of an experienced classroom teacher whose teaching area or academic training is the same as the entry year teacher's, one representative from higher education, and one building or school district administrator. Requirements are for the committee to meet on a formal basis with the entry year teacher three times throughout the school year. The Entry Year Assistance Committee either recommends or fails to recommend the candidate for certification at the final EYAC meeting. A candidate may, upon failure to receive a recommendation for certification, have a second supervised entry year. In the event that an additional year is required, the license is renewable.

The year of supervised teaching, an additional step in the certification process, represents a shift in responsibility for determining the approval of a teacher for complete certification. This new concept means that an individual's preparation for the teaching profession is reinforced by a body of resourceful educators whose

interest is in strengthening the individual's particular skills. It symbolizes a willingness, on the part of the educational establishment, to fortify weak or unsure beginning teachers, and to further strengthen already committed ones. The new concept also means that a local school district shares the responsibility of approval for certification with the state and with the institutions of higher education.

In terms of the curriculum examinations, seventy-nine (79) separate exams were developed to correspond to certification areas. All tests are multiple-choice, untimed, and contain four choices per item. There are three classifications of tests. General tests are given in certification areas that normally are sole teaching areas, such as elementary education, the foreign languages at the secondary level, and specialty or professional areas, such as reading specialists, administrators, librarians, psychometrists, or speech pathologists. General examinations are comprised of 120 items. Umbrella tests usually pertain to secondary level areas such as language arts, mathematics, social studies, industrial arts, and business education. Umbrella exams contain 100 items. Specific area exams are required under each of the umbrellas and consist of content areas such as grammar and composition, American literature and English literature under the Language Arts umbrella. Algebra, geometry, trigonometry, math analysis, and calculus all fall under the Mathematics umbrella, etc. Specific area exams consist of 80 items. Figure 3 is a flow-chart illustrating the eligibility of potential examinees and summarizing the test registration prerequisites. Candidates for licensure may repeat curriculum examinations an unspecified number of times; however, licenses are not normally granted until the candidate has successfully completed curriculum testing.

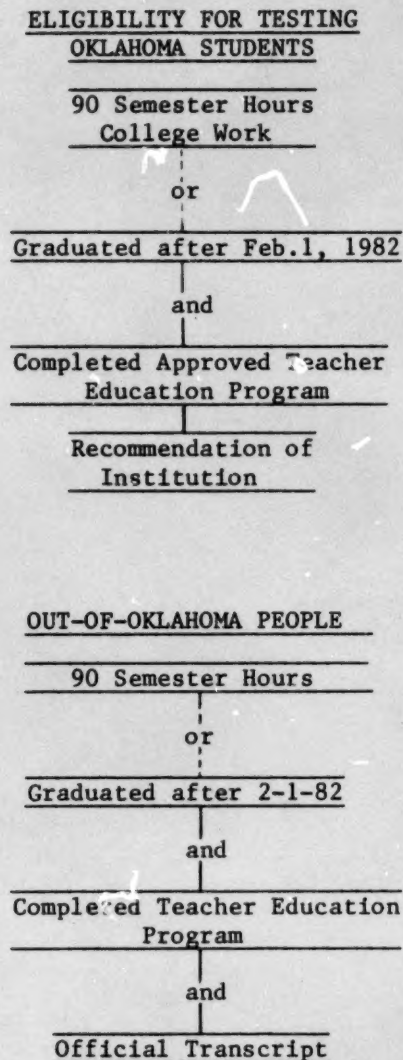


Figure 3

What are the expected outcomes of testing for certification in Oklahoma? The plan is ambitious and the total impact may not be known for several years. One hoped-for eventuality is a closer-knit working relationship among colleges, common education, and state agencies. Another result will surely be an unprecedented involvement of the local school district in the certification of teachers. One thing is clear: No longer will professional standards for teachers be taken for granted in Oklahoma!